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CONTROLLING THE PERFORMANCE OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES
THROUGH THE CREATION OF CONGRUENT ENVIRONMENTS

by

Mary Ann Von Glinow
Graduate School of Business Administration
University of Southern California

Correspondence should be addressed to:

Mary Ann Von Glinow
Department of Organizational Behavior
Bridge 400G
Graduate School of Business Administration
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California 90007
Phone (213) 743-5765



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ABSTRACT

Many problems arise from potential incompatibilities between characteristics of professional employees and characteristics of the organizational situation, specifically its control system. These incompatibilities may lead to dysfunctional conflict between the role expectations of the professional and organizational requirements, depending on the degree to which an incongruence exists between the two. A framework for conceptually analyzing congruence between individual, organizational and occupational components is offered and implications for the control system are made.

CONTROLLING THE PERFORMANCE OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES

Several years ago, a minor but highly dramatized event occurred in New York City: over 2,000 doctors went on strike for four days. In the tradition of all good strikes, picket lines were set up and the doctors made the obligatory demands for better wages, hours, and working conditions (10). This strike by physicians has been followed by others, and people have begun asking critical questions: Why doctors? Aren't they supposed to be professionals with ethical and societal obligations? The striking doctors, however, share some common individual and situational characteristics with other occupational specialties such as teachers, accountants, social workers, engineers, and nurses, who are not highly paid specialists but merely salaried employees of large bureaucratic firms.

Professionals in Organizations

The term "professional" has been bandied about with a growing concern over what it means to be a professional and to belong to a profession. It has been argued that the more advanced a society is industrially, the greater its dependence on professionals and their expertise (23). This dependency is likely to increase; today's rapidly changing environment has increased its demand for professional service spanning a large range of skilled occupational activity. Predictions are that the professional and technical class will be preeminent, with theoretical knowledge at the power base (3, 20). This technical knowledge is challenging traditional hierarchical legitimations of authority and control systems. New skill groups continually arise and are demanding recognition of their qualifications and expertise; this strong desire to control the market for their skills brings professionalization (38).

Durkheim (12) suggests that as societies grow in size, density, and urbanization, the division of labor increases considerably, and specialization allows each segment to go about its business with a minimum of conflict. This differentiation and specialization simultaneously attracts and accommodates different individuals, each with different skills, interests, and expertise. It is the knowledge theme however, that undergirds the thesis that ours is a professionalizing society with professionals and technocrats preeminent in these emergent societies (7, 24).

Contemporary organizations have had a widespread effect on the behavior of professional employees, expressed through intricate and varied control systems designed to induce compliance. Highly specialized or professional individuals are typically not amenable to conventional bureaucratic control systems which emphasize a management culture concerned with organizational loyalty, financial soundness, hierarchical authority and control, as well as growth in production output, volume, and size (22, 43). Instead, professional employees often attempt to redefine the conditions of organizational participation. Hierarchical superiors maintain that they have the right to decide what should be done, whereas these specialists frequently insist that they should have more of that right. This conflict may result in one of two outcomes--either the exercise of formal sanctions over the specialist for noncompliance with the organization's authority and control system or "mock recognition given to line authorities, when in fact a decision has been made by specialists" (38: p. 78). Such fictions permit the traditional image of hierarchical supremacy to remain unchallenged by the relentless advance of scientific knowledge (38).

Freidson (15) suggests that this "new division of labor may in fact require a shift from managerial to occupational authority." Noting this trend, social forecasters (5, 16) predict an increase in professional activities organized around a colleague group of equals, with ultimate control exercised by the professional group itself. Concurrent with this prediction however, is a somewhat paradoxical prediction for greater government control of our professionalized future (5). In addition to affecting policy issues in many industries, the government has become the largest employer of highly skilled professional employees, which suggests a new future relationship between government and the professions (4). Already advancements in technology, often a result of federal funding, have elevated the required skill level of the workforce. Governmental legislation puts considerable pressure on conditions of employment in areas such as equal employment, safety, and labor relations. This enlarged governmental role focuses on the growth of the specialist, which increases the dependency on specialized groups in general, and the ability of the government to create a demand for this specialization.

Such a view of the age of the specialist suggests that professionals as a whole are becoming increasingly important to and integrated within the fabric of our social framework. Currently, over six million members of unions are classified as professional and technical (47). This number does not include non-unionized professionals. Professional employees are not only better trained and educated, but have increased expectations of what organizational life should bring in the way of satisfactions and rewards. Because entry into most organizations generally occurs at a relatively high level for these specialists, these modern employees have

typically been able to bypass the traditional means of promotion which usually meant starting at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy and working one's way up. If the promotion by the hierarchy is not forthcoming, or too slow, or if the specialist's corporate visibility seems impaired, such employees are less hesitant than their counterparts of several decades ago to consider leaving the organization in favor of another in which better opportunities to display his/her specialized skills and to be duly rewarded for them exist.

To some extent this seemingly increased ability and willingness to leave the organization stems from the specialist's increased educational skills, and less of a stake in or appropriate "fit" with the employing organization. However, the willingness to move also stems from the values and attitudes which were inculcated during the extensive training and socialization process--a process culminating in professional values that predate an individual's organization or occupational experiences (48).

The Professional Orientation

There have been a variety of meanings attributed to the values and attitudes comprising a professional orientation. A comprehensive review of the literature concluded that the following characteristics are essential to such an orientation (28): (a) expertise, usually acquired through prolonged specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge; (b) ethics, or the rendering of service to clients without concern for self-interest; (c) collegial maintenance of standards, maintaining performance standards through collegial rather than hierarchical or governmental control, since professionals alone have the expertise to police their specialty; (d) autonomy, the freedom to work on projects they

deem important and to work on them in their own way; (e) commitment to calling, where professionals feel a commitment to their work, their field, and their own careers; and (f) identification with the profession and other professionals. Professionals identify strongly with their profession and use other professionals and professional associations as important referents. They often identify more with their professional subculture than their employing organizations.

Professionals are, in general, more committed to their occupational specialties than to their employing organizations. This poses some rather uncomfortable problems for organizations which have become increasingly reliant on these individuals. These problems are reinforced initially by the costs of selecting and training these specialists and, subsequently, by the organization's attempts to please and satisfactorily motivate and reward the employee (since dissatisfaction often results in withdrawal and turnover). In addition, the organization must be willing to provide continued training so that the specialist's skills will not atrophy, or become obsolete. Most organizations also come to realize that it is difficult to satisfy employees whose expectations are so high, particularly when such expectations are reinforced in the marketplace. The organization may also be unable to obtain company loyalty from these newer employees as it came to expect of the "organization man." In fact, the allegiance of professionals may always be suspect and grounds for continuing conflicts between them and the authority and control systems of organizations (26, 28). As an increasing number of specialists enter the workforce, the problem of mediating the tensions between the professional's orientation and the organization's control systems may be

central in retaining valued organizational employees and increasing their performance.

Sources of Tension

The literature about professionals places considerable emphasis on the inevitability of conflict between the professional and the organization (8, 14, 18). Yet it is quite possible that the question of professional-organizational conflict is contingent upon the type of organization and the type of organization policies and practices that exist; conflict may be a problem in some organizations and not in others (48). While a certain amount of conflict with clients is characteristic of free agents contracting to perform services, the salaried professional in a bureaucratic firm is confronted with threats to his/her autonomy since upon hiring, the professional implicitly agrees to exchange some autonomy for organizational resources (40). The individual's reaction to the use of authority for control purposes may constitute the most critical variable in organizational accommodation. This speculation reflects a widely held position--that the professional and the bureaucracy are antithetical to each other, and conflict arises due to basic differences between the two normative systems (40, 44).

The major source of conflict between bureaucracies and professions ... is in the realm of authority relations. Hierarchical authority permeates bureaucracies, and executives typically demand from their subordinates compliance to organizational rules and procedures. By contrast, professional authority emanates from superior expertise which requires individual autonomy in decision making and task operations. (35).

This conflict produces distinctive climates where members are "expected to be loyal to the organization, to behave consistently and rationally according to technical and professional criteria, and to defer

to the authority of the organization's leaders" (38: p. 4). In short, professional standing may be precarious in organizational settings where power, loyalty, and status rather than skill tend to be the source of influence. Since the organizational professional is part of a bureaucratic structure, it could be difficult for the professional to exercise discretion in setting personal work goals, deciding how energy will be spent, and working in terms of knowledge rather than time.

This conflict may be reduced according to some (32,46), by requiring the organization to reaffirm the principles of professionalism. Glaser (17) suggests that the issue is clearly dependent on the firm's ability to synchronize its goals and those of the individual professional. Miller (34) concurs, and suggests a loosening of control over the professional by the organization. This position is also taken by Hall (20), who calls for the lessening of bureaucratization.

Some maintain that the extent to which professional-organizational conflict may be altered, or susceptible to organizational control, is dependent primarily on the individual. Gouldner (19) for example, found that notwithstanding long years of training and marketability, a decision on whether to leave the organization or stay and seek internal rewards is clearly dependent on personal goal fulfillment (internal or external to the organization). This position suggests that a tradeoff will be made if the organization offers greater opportunities for advancement than does the profession. Brown (9) and Avery (1) support this position--an individual will choose the profession over the organization only if the individual perceives greater chances for goal achievement in the profession.

Others suggest that control is contingent more on the organization-- that the individual can in fact be shaped by the organization's distinctive climate or culture. Dewhirst (11) found that the organization, through its socialization processes, influenced professionals' attitudes and behaviors. Miller (34) found that the extent to which the organization encouraged professionals through supervisory support produced a significant effect on the amount of work alienation that occurred. Riegel (39) and Hower and Orth (22) suggest that the quality of facilities and services are very important to professionals. McCarrey and Edwards (31) suggest that an organization's ability to provide "facilitative support services" and "opportunities for personal and professional self-development" in their sample of government scientists was also important to individual professionals. Barber (2) reports organizational encouragement of individual professionalism by strengthening technical skills and expertise. LaPorte (29), Whyte (51), and Saxberg and Slocum (41) all suggest that organizations can minimize role conflict and tension if individual professionals are not confronted with competing role demands--from the individual himself and from the employing organization. Further, those organizations which can provide recognition for scientific and technical contributions also have been found to encourage individual professionalism (30, 42). Consistent with the above are findings by Pelz and Andrews (36), who suggest that the optimal climate for scientists in organizations is one of "controlled freedom" by the employing organization. Engel (13) points out that a controlled freedom can be achieved within a moderately bureaucratic setting which provides greater autonomy for the physician than either a highly bureaucratic or a nonbureaucratic setting.

traditional professional classification schemes (those who see professional-bureaucratic conflict as inevitable, with tight control systems oriented toward this ever-present tension) and the myriad of variations on those early classification schemes (those who argue that there are degrees of tension present which may or may not be dysfunctional, depending on the extent to which individual characteristics are congruent with situational characteristics); therefore, control systems would reflect a range of variability, depending on the professional and the situation (s)he is in.

One of the primary sources of frustration in categorizing the research literature relates to this morass of contradictions and inconsistencies of findings. Underlying this confusion is the fact that "conflict" is often assumed to be present, but is not measured; when it is measured, it is often done in such a way that permits the researcher to determine whether conflict exists, and how much exists, but tells us nothing about the different kinds of tensions, stresses, or intensities of conflict that exist, and the behavioral responses that professionals will display in different situations for coping with these stresses. Further, while latent conflict may indeed be inevitable, if conflict is not manifested, it will not in all likelihood be assumed to exist with an insensitive control system, and hence will not be not taken into consideration in attempting to control performance.

In addition, the traditional view of professional-bureaucratic conflict takes as its task the fairly difficult problem of assimilating the professional into the organization, and with the increasing number of organizational professionals, much effort has been directed toward

These two positions imply that characteristics of people and situations in which people are organizationally located, may be fruitfully studied as joint determinants of individual attitudes and behaviors with implications for the control process. The research to date suggests that the congruency between individuals and situations may be an important influence on criteria, though inconsistent findings have plagued much of this research. Terborg (45) suggests that few guidelines are provided researchers for selecting relevant individual and situational characteristics. This inattention has had serious consequences in that a major advantage of the use of such approaches lies in considering individuals and situational characteristics before the research has been designed and the data collected. Therefore, an effort should be made to make sense of some of the inconsistent findings, particularly in terms of controlling the performance of professional employees in bureaucratic settings.

Inconsistent Patterns in Professionalism Research

As stated earlier, within many organizations there is an inherent tension between those in hierarchical authority positions and those who play specialized roles. This tension may be conceptualized as a conflict over the legitimacy of these two bases of authority (38). However, professional-bureaucratic conflict is a vague, ill-defined and overly simplistic term used to refer to a wide variety of potential dysfunctions. We have regularly been told of the inevitability of professional-bureaucratic conflict (7, 19, 34, 50); however, there have been a significant number of findings which show no consistent patterns. The inconsistency in this trail of research serves to usefully distinguish between

Organizations have thus been capable of creating climates in which it behooves a specialist to maintain organizational loyalty and adhere to hierarchial authority and control systems. These climates for matching professional goals with organizational goals can be enhanced by providing various professional incentives and evaluational criteria consistent with the professional's orientation (49). Despite the fact that it appears possible to synchronize a professional's values and attitudes with the organizational control system, the process of effecting a congruency or "fit" between the professional, the employing organization (and, depending upon the strength of the professional's orientation, the profession itself as an external referent) has not been systematically explored as a control process.

Creating Congruent Environments

The congruency proposition has long been recognized as a viable approach to the study of behavior that emphasizes a complex series of interactions between individual characteristics and situational characteristics (33, 25) that are continuous and multi-directional (45). The Functionalist school of Thought, for example, suggests that outcomes such as performance and satisfaction can be improved by the creation and maintenance of a "fit" between the individual's personality and the environment in which the person functions (37). Those espousing interactional psychology suggest that

"situations vary in cues, rewards and opportunities and that people vary in cognitions, abilities, and motivation. Consequently, accurate measurement of individual differences and accurate measure of situational differences both become necessary. [Further] . . . Behavior, people and situations are interdependent both at a given point in time, and at past and future times . . . people respond to situations they encounter as well as create new situations." (45).

finding ways of reducing or alleviating the conflict altogether and strengthening the control over the professional. This argument for reducing conflict does not speak to the issue of latent conflict, nor does it recognize the fact that conflict can contribute to the integration of professionals into organizations.

Since the origin of most dissatisfaction in industrial scientists and other employees with advanced technical training may be traced to tensions between their desires to function as "professionals" and the management's press to fit them into the "organizational mold," this tension or conflict poses potential problems in accommodating organizational professionals. Indeed, the "fit" or congruency may be a precursor to controlling the performance of professional employees. Therefore, the following framework for analysis is presented for conceptualizing the organizational control process as a function of the congruency between individual professionals and the organizational situation. Because professionals so frequently identify with professional associations, or other occupational substructures, the profession itself is factored into this framework--not in an attempt to overshadow individual or situational characteristics, but simply as a powerful external referent.

Framework for Analysis

This framework is an attempt to explore the congruence or incongruence which exists between the individual professional, the employing organization and the profession, and its implication for control systems. This framework depicts individual-organizational-occupational interactions in terms of the degree to which: (1) the individual possesses a professional orientation; (2) the organization encourages or

inhibits those professional values through its authority and control system, and (3) the occupation is professionalized and serves as a powerful referent.

Previous professionalism research has paid virtually no attention to understanding and predicting behavioral responses to outcomes based on the degree of fit between individuals and situations. The following framework focuses explicitly on the individual-situational congruence patterns and the implication for the control system (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Patterns of Congruence and Incongruence

Cell number:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
INDIVIDUAL ^a	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
OCCUPATION ^b	High	High	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low
EMPLOYING ^c ORGANIZATION	High	High	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Low

^aIn the INDIVIDUAL row, a "high" indicates that the respondent possesses (to a relatively high degree) the expertise and attitudinal characteristics of a professional (autonomy, ethics, belief in collegial maintenance of standards, external referents, and commitment to calling).

^bIn the OCCUPATIONAL row, a "high" indicates that the respondent's occupation possesses (to a relatively high degree) the structural characteristics of a profession (abstract body of knowledge, provision for formal training, code of ethics, orientation toward service, existence of formal societies with some power over entry to the occupation, licensing of practitioners, maintenance of educational and performance quality standards, and political efforts or power to win recognition over work related matters) and the profession serves as a powerful referent for the professional individual.

^cIn the EMPLOYING ORGANIZATION row, a "high" indicates that the employer is viewed as essentially facilitating, rather than inhibiting opportunities for individuals to act as professionals through its authority and control system.

With respect to the earlier discussion of professional-bureaucratic conflict, the 3 x 8 matrix suggests that a particular type of conflict (e.g., role conflict) may or may not occur, depending on the degree of incongruity among the three independent variables. No type of conflict would be expected to occur when the three independent variables are congruent with one another as in cells 1 and 8. Thus, in contrast to the traditional classification schemes that predicted the inevitability of "professional-bureaucratic" conflict, this framework makes no claim as to its inevitability. However, the likelihood of either manifest or latent role conflict occurring would be expected to increase as the incongruency increases. That is, as the individual faces increasingly discrepant signals from the organization and occupational role senders, the greater the chance for role conflict (as in cell 7, for example).

Similarly, if the organization is incongruent with both the individual and occupation, organizational rewards and incentives for controlling the performance of professional employees will more than likely be inappropriate. The extent to which professional-bureaucratic conflict exists will be contingent on the degree of congruency between the individual, the organization and the occupation as pictured in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

These patterns illustrate hypothetical environments wherein various degrees of incongruency exist. Under each incongruent environment (Cells 2-7) the possibility exists for the creation of a more appropriate fit through the shaping and/or controlling the one incongruent factor. This can often be accomplished via the organization's control system. Each of these environments are discussed more fully.

Congruent Patterns

Professional Congruence (Cell 1) and Non-Professional Congruence (Cell 8). Both of these patterns illustrate a perfect fit or congruency pattern. In both Cell 1 where the environment is one of Professional Congruence, and Cell 8, where the environment is labelled Non-Professional Congruence, affective outcomes such as satisfaction would be expected to be high, with all of the conflict-related criteria (e.g., stress, withdrawal, turnover) expected to be low. The implication here is that whether the control system is tightly or loosely controlled, the control principles in use are appropriate given the degree of fit/congruency between the individual and the situational characteristics.

In the Professional Congruence environment (Cell 1) all factors are congruent and highly professional. An example might be a research laboratory employing highly skilled scientists, who belong to a professional association that encourages norms of science and professionalism. In such an environment, the control system relies on individual and/or peer control coupled with occupational control to produce harmonious outcomes. Any attempt at restructuring the organization's control system to more tightly control the individual would most likely be dysfunctional.

Similarly, in the Non-Professional Congruence environment (Cell 8) all factors are equally congruent and non-professional. An example might be an unskilled laborer, without benefit of an occupational association, working in a company concerned only with profitability, not professionalism. In this environment professionalism is not a salient factor, nor is individual, peer, or occupational control a viable means of monitoring and controlling performance. Performance within the Non-Professional Congruence environment is achieved most frequently via conventional control systems rather than those designed to induce compliance from professionals.

Incongruent Patterns

The Under-Professionalized Individual (Cell 2). This pattern represents an incongruency not considered by professionalism researchers, i.e., organizational and occupational role senders signal that the professional orientation is valued. The Under-Professionalized Individual, however, does not possess and may not care to develop the professional values and attitudes critical for creating a close fit. The expected result might be the individual's assumption of a "local" attitude (which may or may not be rewarded in the organic organizational structure) with potential role ambiguity regarding role expectations. The organization's control system might, as in the Cell 4 pattern, be programmed to scan for such potential problems.

The Under-Professionalized Occupation (Cell 3). This pattern resembles the Over-Professionalized Occupation (Cell 6) in that an incongruency exists due to lack of a professionalized occupation. Although there is a clear fit between the individual and the organization,

such a condition is consistent with the results of the Bennis et. al. (6) study of nurses employed in outpatient clinics. They found that professional (cosmopolitan) nurses, in the absence of a strong profession with which to identify, turned toward the organization and assumed more of a "local" orientation. The traditional literature on Professionalism has been unable to account for such findings, i.e., the subsequent realigning of value orientations by professionals after entry into an organization. In the Under-Professionalized Occupation, realignment of values is congruent with the organization's authority and control system. Controlling professionals may be predicated on the relative strength of the organization to compensate for the professional-occupational vacuum.

The Over-Professionalized Organization (Cell 4). This pattern again represents an incongruity not dealt with in the professionalism literature. Here, the organization appears willing to encourage individual-level professionalism. The individual has a low professional orientation, and the occupation is not professionalized. This suggests that the individual's skills may have atrophied, or become obsolescent in such an organization, as may be the case with some engineers forced to move into a management career (28). The management career may not provide the engineer with job descriptions, standard operating procedures, rules, regulations, or formalization. This would result in high tension and stress regarding the individual's work expectations. A control system designed to monitor obsolescence, or one which can accommodate individuals low in tolerance for uncertainty, would be useful to alert the organization to potential problem areas. When there is an individual-organizational incongruity, the organization's control system would

signal the need for the obsolescent professional to upgrade his/her skills, or learn to cope with a certain amount of structural uncertainty.

Underprofessionalized Organization (Cell 5). The Under-Professionalized Organization is one in which the individual and occupation show a good fit in terms of the classic professionalism model; however, the organization is discrepant with both the individual and occupation. Such might be the case with a highly professionalized employee who has been forced to move (against personal preference) into management where technical expertise is not rewarded, thus highlighting an individual-situational misfit. When this occurs, the prevailing control system would have monitored a professional's behavior as though (s)he were non-professional by offering incentives and rewards which are not consonant with the reward preferences of a professional. The authority and control system to monitor and control the professional's performance in the Under-Professionalized Organization may take two forms: (1) It can intensify efforts to shape the professional's behavior so as to be more congruent with that of the organization through rewards and punishments designed to effect compliance. However, depending on the strength of the occupation's reinforcement of individual professionalism, this option may only serve to create additional tension between the individual and the organization. (2) The organization can attempt to lessen its authority and control structures by reflexively providing incentives and evaluational criteria consistent with the professional's orientation. In either case, action is called for on the part of the organization to effect a stable congruency pattern.

The Over-Professionalized Occupation (Cell 6). This setting illustrates another pattern of incongruity not generally considered in the traditional professionalism literature. In this case a nonprofessional individual is employed in a firm which does not value professional norms. However, a strong set of professional occupational norms exist. This pattern might lead to an increased interest in internal politics and a desire for administrative duties by the individual. In such cases, a traditional control system would serve to adequately monitor the individual's performance. Concurrently, the individual may exhibit compliance with professional norms by "lip service" to the occupational norms of science and professionalism.

The Over-Professionalized Individual (Cell 7). This pattern predicts no occupational support for the professional employee in an organization. This pattern resembles the Under-Professionalized Organization (Cell 5) except that the professional individual in the Under-Professionalized Organization could alleviate frustration by turning outward to the profession and becoming more "cosmopolitan", whereas the professional individual in this case has no such occupational referent. The control system in such a case would focus on shaping the professional individual with incentives and rewards based on professional values and attitudinal characteristics. There should also be a strong effort to lessen the perceived gap between the individual and the organizational situation.

Summary

This framework for analysis does not, a priori, assume the inevitability of professional-bureaucratic conflict. The model suggests that when individual-situational characteristics are congruent with each other, harmonious patterns would be expected to exist. If however, an incongruity emerges, this "misfit" (with attendant dysfunctional behavior) will be a function of the strength of the factors which deviate. Creating a congruence between the individual and the situation appears to be a function of the reflexivity of the control system, or the early and continuing ability of the control system to sense and correct incongruities between individual and situational characteristics.

In summary, controlling the performance of professional employees appears contingent on the degree to which congruent environments can be created which can mediate tensions between the professional's orientation and the situation within which (s)he performs. The manner in which organizations develop and use their professional talent depends in part on the congruence between the individual, the organizational situation, and the occupation brought about by careful attention to the reflexivity of the control system. The neglect of the professional employee through inattention to the subtleties of this control process resulting in obsolescence, dissatisfaction, or turnover is a risk no organization should willingly assume.

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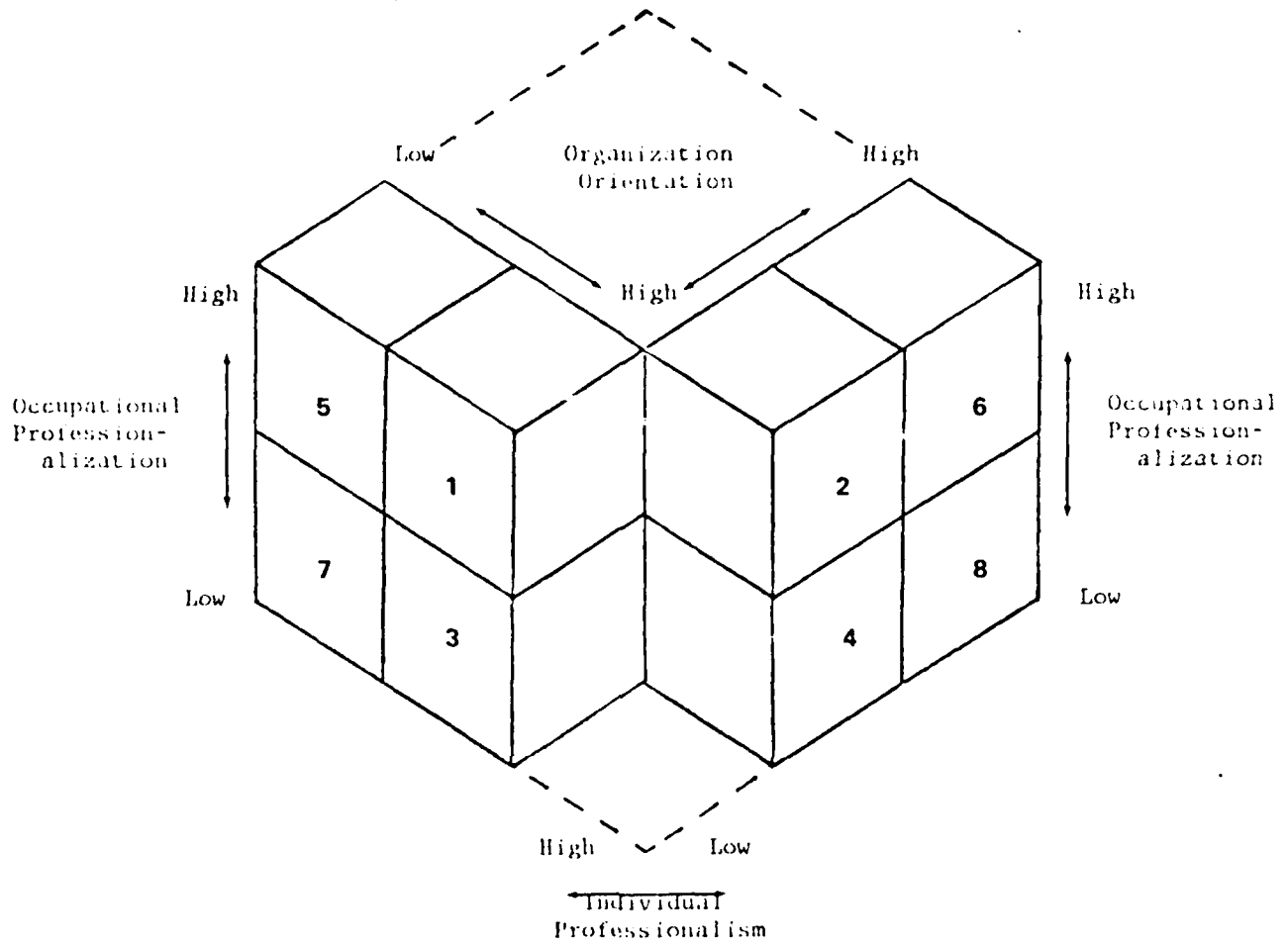
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FIGURE 2



Cell	Patterns of Individual Organizational Occupational Fit	Individual	Occupation	Employing Organization
1.	Professional Congruence	High	High	High
2.	Under-Professionalized Individual	Low	High	High
3.	Under-Professionalized Occupation	High	Low	High
4.	Over-Professionalized Organization	Low	Low	High
5.	Under-Professionalized Organization	High	High	Low
6.	Over-Professionalized Occupation	Low	High	Low
7.	Over-Professionalized Individual	High	Low	Low
8.	Non-Professional Congruence	Low	Low	Low

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